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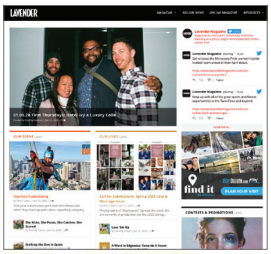

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ON THE COVER
Explore the wonders of the Midwest with a good ol' fashioned road trip.
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Elijah McGregor Fortson refers to himself as a Gay Capricorn of Color (GCC), a prolific dancer, a discourse addict, a hot-take connoisseur, a fount of comic book and anime trivia, a social justice warrior and a man trying to figure out what to do with an Ivy league degree in Media Studies.
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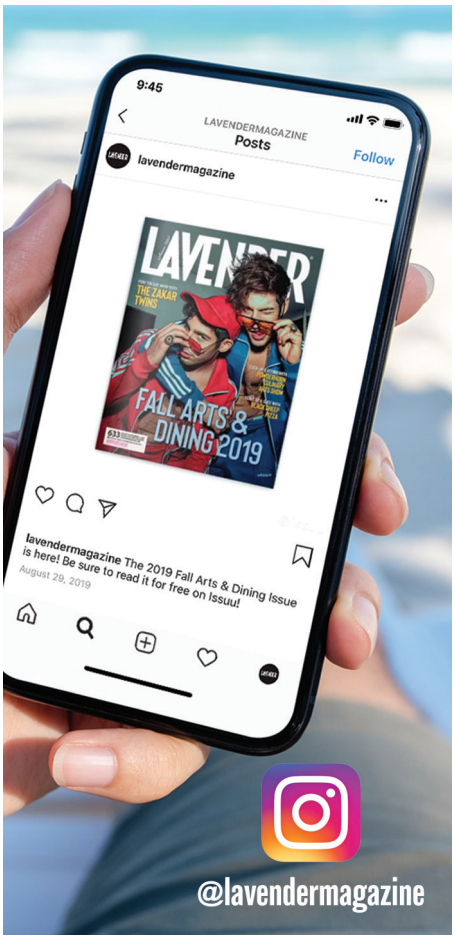

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FROM THE EDITOR | BY CHRIS TARBOX

We're In This Together

As we contend with the current public health crisis regarding the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) in the United States and abroad, it's imperative that we take stock of what's most important during this strange, difficult, and somewhat surreal chapter of human history: our friends, our families, our communities, and ensuring their health and safety as we weather this storm.

It's not a leap to say that most if not all of us have been impacted in one way or another by this pandemic. Aside from the implementation of social distancing and self-isolation, many businesses and organizations have been negatively affected due to closures, whether they're schools, restaurants, bars, theaters, or libraries. Many of these groups are near and dear to the GLBT community, and now more than ever, we need to reach out and help those affected in any way we can.

As for *Lavender*, we are still here for our rainbow community, albeit with some changes for the time being. Our previously planned Dine OUT and Big Gay Brews issues—which were slated for release on April 9 and April 23, respectively—will be postponed to later dates in light of the current situation, and we will be providing different themed content for those dates in the meantime. As it was already in production as the COVID-19 situation intensified, we're presenting our Midwest Spring And Summer Travel issue to you, and we'll be focusing on stories revolving around locales easily reached via road trips.

Photo courtesy of BigStock/Iryna Imago

We're also compiling a list of Twin Cities restaurants and bars that are offering take-out and delivery services during dine-in closures. The list will be featured on www.lavendermagazine.com. If your business is offering these services, email linda@lavendermagazine.com and we will update the online list accordingly.

We appreciate your patience and understanding as we tweak our planned content in light of these circumstances. In the meantime, for guidelines on how to keep yourself and others healthy and safe during this crisis, visit cdc.gov for more information. Stay strong, friends! We'll all get through this together! ∎

A WORD IN EDGEWISE | BY E.B. BOATNER

When Your Alma Mater Isn't

On March 10, according to the Harvard *Crimson*, the University warned its 6,000 undergraduates that it would be shutting down, that students and their possessions must be out by March 15, to work thenceforward "at a distance." In "The Shortest Notice Possible," *Crimson* staff writers Juiet E. Isselbacher and Amanda Y. Su argue that this edict particularly affects first-generation and low-income (FGLI) students. They stress that for many of these students, their only stability is at college, which provides a safe environment, food, and the term-time employment essential to cover other living costs. One student states, "Harvard prides itself on having a massive student body that is a large percentage on financial aid...they forget those are the same students who often come from home situations that are uncomfortable."

Not only are the added costs of storage and unexpected travel beyond the reach of many of the FGLI students, but not all have home computers, or, in rural areas, reliable Internet connections. "The Harvard community itself is the only equalizer," felt another, "If you take away campus living and residential life then you take away that equalizer." What exactly does a college or university owe its charges, especially during a time of crisis? An educational institution is not a babysitter, but it does stand *in loco parentis*. *Alma mater* means, "nurturing mother," and this particular mother went to great lengths to be inclusive, admitting bright students whose family finances and situations were known to be fragile.

The University's endowment currently exceeds 38 billion, with each of its schools owning a share of that total; could not the college provide some protection? Cover storage fees; assist in costly travel fees? Keep one (or more) of the dorms open to qualifying students to maintain stability through meals, shelter, and ready access to their online courses? How are other *alma maters* handling this crisis?

Here, UMN is suspending in-person classes on all campuses, although resident halls, dining services and other student services will remain open for now, said University President Joan Gabel. She added, "For classes that cannot be taught online, the instructor will contact students with further information...While we do not have all of the answers at this moment, please know that we are working around the clock to find answers and solutions."

New York's governor announced that all SUNY and CUNY schools across New York will start "distance learning" March 19, although the campuses will not be closed. "They're not evicting anyone," Cuomo stated. "They are not closing the dorm or kicking you out...If students have hardships with nowhere to go, there will be consideration."

Each institution must find its solution. One less draconian than Fair Harvard's? Time will tell. ∎

LAVENDER LENS | PHOTOS BY SOPHIA HANTZES

Photo by Sophia Hantzes

SUPERMAN BECOMES LOIS LANE

FEB. 9, 2020

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LAVENDER LENS | PHOTOS BY SOPHIA HANTZES

TWIN CITIES GAY MEN'S CHORUS: SING IT FORWARD QUEEN OF HEARTS BALL

FEB. 15, 2020

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Photo courtesy of Trish Foster

DISCOVER ST. LOUIS PARK

Business: Discover St. Louis Park

Your Name: Trish Foster

Job Title: Marketing Director

Give us a brief overview of your business and what services you provide the community: Discover St. Louis Park is a Destination Marketing Organization (DMO) representing St. Louis Park and Golden Valley. Our mission is to strengthen awareness of St. Louis Park and Golden Valley as a prime meeting and visitor destination, stimulate economic development and support community growth. We provide information about area lodging, dining, attractions, shopping, events, arts & culture, recreational opportunities and meeting spaces.

How many years have you been in business? We are currently in our ninth year.

What's something unique we should know about your business? All of our services are complimentary. We welcome meetings, groups and events of all types and sizes. We'll help you plan your wedding, corporate meeting, sporting event, family reunion, bat mitzvah and more—all free of charge. We assist with venue selection, hotel room blocks, and vendor recommendations. We also provide visitor guides, maps, and other welcome materials.

What's your favorite thing about your job? My favorite thing is getting to share my love of St. Louis Park and Golden Valley with both residents and tourists. I often learn about new restaurants, attractions, and events before anyone else and I share this information on our website, social media, and our bimonthly newsletter. I'm able to use a variety of marketing tactics and media—print, radio, digital, connected TV—to help others learn about our wonderful communities.

What's the best thing about working with the GLBT community? We enjoy working with groups from all backgrounds and are proud of the fact that St. Louis Park and Golden Valley are such welcoming and diverse communities. Each year, we support and participate in the Golden Valley Pride Festival, which is the largest suburban pride festival in Minnesota—be sure to stop by our table and say "Hi!" We love helping GLBT couples or groups find the perfect venue for a wedding, reception, or other social/corporate event. We've always had such a positive experience working with the GLBT community and we look forward to more of these opportunities in the future.

Does your business have anything new, fun or unique happening on the horizon? Yes! On June 8, we celebrate the grand opening of the net zero energy-designed interpretive center at Westwood Hills Nature Center. There will be music, live animal programs, puppet shows, exhibits for all ages, and more. And, of course, the 5th Annual Golden Valley Pride Festival is being held on June 13 at Brookview Park in Golden Valley. Visitors will enjoy a variety of live music, gourmet food trucks, local eatery stations, a beer and wine garden, community exhibits and activities for kids and adults. Our website has all the latest information on cool things happening in our area.

If you weren't doing your current job, what would you be doing? I would work in the film industry, in a behind-the-scenes capacity. Thanks to the Twin Cities Film Fest, I've had the opportunity to work with some incredibly talented local Minnesota filmmakers on tourism videos for Discover St. Louis Park and would love to get more involved. But I don't foresee leaving my current job anytime soon! ∎

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QUEER CONTENT TO STREAM IN YOUR HOME

The novel coronavirus (COVID-19) has forced the closure of businesses across the country from bars to restaurants and other small businesses. Even Broadway has succumbed to the pandemic and have dimmed their lights for the next couple of weeks. The forced hiatus has spilled into the entertainment world across the country with movie theaters, entertainment venues and stage theaters alike closing shows early or postponing.

Social distancing has caused many to stay home and endlessly scroll through streaming services trying to find something to watch. That's why I wanted to take a second to offer some incredible queer-oriented options for you to watch or listen to right from home.

VISIBLE: OUT ON TELEVISION

Documentary
Apple TV+

Over the last couple of years, the phrase "representation matters" continues to weave itself into the pop culture and entertainment industry. *Visible: Out on Television* is a documentary miniseries on Apple TV+ that chronicles GLBT representation in American television. The series takes a closer look at five different eras and themes, including "The Dark Ages," "Television as a Tool," "The Epidemic," "Breakthroughs," and "The New Guard."

Throughout the series, there are countless of well-known allies and queer people from Tim Gunn to Wanda Sykes, who executive produced the show. While the series takes on the milestones and wins we've had, it isn't shy to say where it's gone wrong and can improve on in the future.

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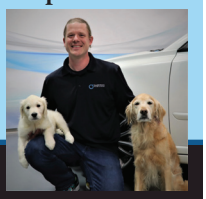

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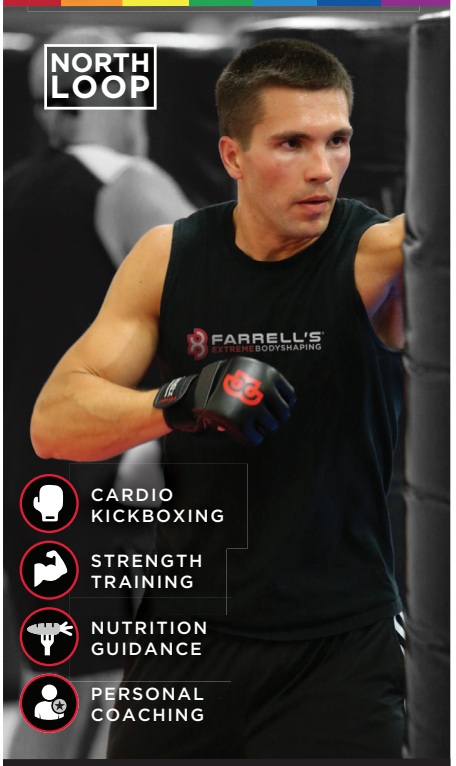

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FOOD 4 THOT

Podcast
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Podcasts have evolved to being listened to almost just as much as music. With an hour-long commute to work, two hours if you count the drive home, I've embraced podcasts to the fullest. *Food 4 THOT*—yes spelled T-H-O-T—was a podcast my best friend Michael got me hooked on last year around Pride. This round-table discussion features four multi-racial and queer writers.

The podcast has weekly discussions about "sex, identity, culture, what [they] like to read…and who [they] like to read." If you're active on Twitter, you may recognize Fran Tirado, who heads up GLBT content at Netflix, along with Tommy "Teebs" Pico, an indigenous American poet, Dennis Norris II, an author and ex-figure skater, and Joe Osmundson, a nonfiction writer and scientist.

THE BIRDCAGE

Movie
Amazon Prime Video

Arguably one of my favorite movies, *The Birdcage* will offer a nice escape from the world with plenty of laughs to keep your spirits high during self-quarantine. Featuring the iconic comedic duo of Nathan Lane and the late, great Robin Williams, who star as Armand Goldman and Albert, respectively. The two openly-gay club owners live in South Beach. The farce takes place when their son (actually Armand's from twenty years before) wants to introduce his dads to his future in-laws. What they don't know is his soon-to-be father-in-law is a strict conservative Republican. Comedic chaos ensues when Albert, a drag queen by night, attempts to pose as the matriarch of the family.

The Birdcage is based on the popular French farce *La Cage Aux Folles*, which was also adapted into a musical. It features the famous, oft-performed song by drag queens, "I Am What I Am."

FORTUNE FEIMSTER: SWEET & SALTY

Stand-Up Comedy Special
Netflix

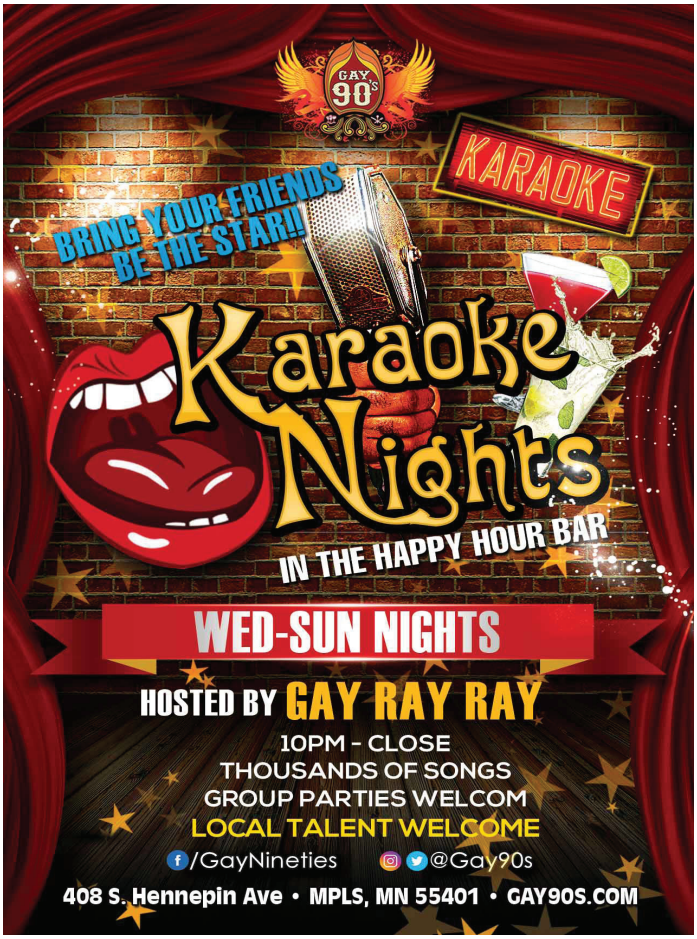
Maybe movies, documentaries or podcasts aren't your thing. If that's the case, I highly suggest looking through the stand-up comedy section in Netflix. In January, *Fortune Feimster: Sweet & Salty* dropped and offered a fresh new hour-long comedic set. Feimster delivers joke after joke talking about her experience at Hooters as a young closeted lesbian, her time on the swim team and Sunday visits to Chili's with her family.

On the surface, *Sweet & Salty* is hilarious, but it also offers plenty of heart while Feimster self-reflects on her journey to where she is now.

DIFFICULT PEOPLE

Comedy Series
Hulu

Difficult People will forever go down as the show that got away. This three-season show stars Julie Klausner and Billy Eichner as two struggling comedians in New York City. *Difficult People* is one of those rare comedies that makes you laugh and then you say to yourself, "Should I have laughed?" If you like dark comedy, people yelling, and special guest appearances by Tina Fey and Lin-Manuel Miranda, then this show is for you. ▮



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MILLENNIUM
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NEVER NOT A NATURALIST

BY KASSIDY TARALA

Linda Radimecky, an interpretive naturalist for the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, discusses the work she's done in Afton State Park—and beyond—for more than two decades.

Linda Radimecky is an interpretive naturalist for the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources. Photo by Deborah Rose

Naturalist Linda Radimecky grew up with an appreciation and curiosity for the great outdoors. After moving to Bloomington from Chicago when she was four years old, she had easy access to the central Minnesota farm that her father grew up on.

"I got to run all over that land when visiting my grandparents. I especially loved walking in the fall along an old wagon road that wound through the woods. I was curious about many things and asked a lot of questions of my dad—some he could answer, and some he couldn't, so I tried to find out," Radimecky recalls. "I did not know what a naturalist was until I was in college and either had to write a thesis or complete an internship. Not wanting to write yet another paper, I chose to intern at Wood Lake Nature Center in Richfield, Minnesota. I fell in love with it the first day as I ran around playing and learning with preschoolers. I loved sharing

Continued on page 20

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what I knew and learning what I didn't along with the kids—discovering and exploring."

Now, more than two decades into her career as a naturalist with the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, Radimecky gets to discover and explore for a living. As a naturalist, Radimecky works to develop, implement, and publicize a comprehensive year-round area state park and trails interpretive and information service. She helps enhance the public's awareness, appreciation, and understanding of the natural, cultural, and recreational resources at Afton State Park and other area state trails and units. Her work helps change visitors' attitudes and behaviors toward nature and raise awareness of current environmental issues.

"I help people feel comfortable, have fun, and hopefully appreciate the outdoors by leading walks, bike rides, fishing programs, and helping to identify things people see in the parks and on the state trails," she says. "Naturalists try to teach in a way that visitors don't always realize they are learning something. I provide opportunities at Afton State Park, Gateway Brown's Creek, Luce Line, and Minnesota Valley State Trails."

There's little that Radimecky doesn't like about her job—comprised of playing, teaching, learning, and exploring the outdoors—but what she loves most is that every day on the job is different.

"I love the people I meet and get to have conversations with, share their first time discoveries, watch birds return in the spring and start nesting. I really enjoy watching the seasons ebb and flow and see how everything in connected," she shares.

Though Radimecky works in state parks and trails throughout Minnesota, a large part of her job is the work she does in Afton State Park.

"Afton State Park is loved by many. We have a backpack-only campground, and it is a hike to get it, but once there, it is beautiful! Afton State Park has a lot of hills and topography, and lots of people run and train every day on our trails—with skiing and snowshoeing in the winter," she says. "We have great walking trails along the St. Croix River, with lots of wildlife and birds to see. The original vegetation of the area was Oak Savanna, which is prairie with Burr oak trees scattered through it."

Radimecky says that when you visit a prairie, it seems like there is always some plant blooming no matter the growing season, which is true of Afton State Park. The park also features four cabins and two yurts, which can be rented.

As a member of the GLBT community, Radimecky says she has always felt welcome in her industry and never has to give her identity a second thought.

"I rarely think about it. I talk about my life like all of my co-workers do. I do not wear my lifestyle on my sleeve and don't draw attention to it, but I don't hide it either," she says. "I am married with no kids (except the four-legged furry versions). I don't know if I am ever not doing naturalist work. I like to fly fish and teach others that art. We make maple syrup at home and watch birds, visit new pubs and try their offerings, and camp in Minnesota State Parks."

When she isn't enjoying nature (and pubs) with her wife, she is helping the Department of Natural Resources manage the land "owned by the people."

"It's a great responsibility, and we all do our best given the tools we have. We try to manage the land in a way that is best for everyone and all of the sometimes conflicting views on how that should happen," she explains. "We try to manage for future generations while balancing the needs of the present. We try to help people appreciate what we have in Minnesota in hopes of fostering a caring stewardship of the land and resources."

For more information on the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, visit www.dnr.state.mn.us. ▮

Linda Radimecky works as a naturalist at Afton State Park, Gateway Brown's Creek, Luce Line, and Minnesota Valley State Trails. Photo by Deborah Rose

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THE NOT-SO-LEVEL SANDS OF NEARBY MICHIGAN

BY E.B. BOATNER
PHOTOS BY E.B. BOATNER

Growing up in Connecticut, residing decades in Boston, I always felt close to the ocean. The Atlantic. When the wind was right, rain approaching, I could smell the salt. Minnesota, for all its 10,000 lakes, felt far from the great salt waters, but a trip to Mother Superior opened my eyes to another kind of Great; here was Homer's "wine-dark sea" writ upon fresh water.

Another watery epiphany struck on a trip to the eastern shores of Lake Michigan, at the Warren Dunes. Some 70 miles beyond Chicago, you can take a road trip or fly into South Bend, IN, and rent a car. It's a 45-minute drive to New Buffalo, MI, where we stayed in the dockside Marina Grand Resort. The Michigan Shores area has been a mecca for tourists since the 1850s, so today there are more things to tour, eat, and experience than will fit into a single visit.

After an evening relaxing on our private balcony, watching the setting sun cast reflections of the moored boats onto the Marina, we set out for the Dunes. That's a short eleven miles north along the shoreline to 12032 Red Arrow Highway in Sawyer, to the Warren Dunes State Park. While I found the usual horizontal swathes—some three miles—of white beach, I was awed by the unexpected verticality of this sand. I lingered, taking photographs, and noticed as other visitors appeared, many immediately raced towards the first slope, scrambling up its side as though accepting a silent challenge.

A view through trees up a dune at Warren Dunes State Park.

Continued on page 24

The Dunes can rise to a height of some 260 feet. Some have names; the tallest, Tower Hill, alongside Mt. Edwards, Fuller, and Pikes Peak. Nature has cunningly arranged for them to have a consistent 30-degree pitch; inviting, but deceptively difficult for human feet to maneuver in sand. While luring the unwary tourist, the sand has another, more sinister agenda; it works relentlessly to gain dominion over the surrounding forest. The glinting slopes may look more like snow, but the quartz grains gain ground with every lap of the waves.

Prevailing westerly winds impart tremendous energy to Lake Michigan's waves; they, in turn, move heavier grains toward the shore, especially during lake storms. Afterwards, as the grains dry, the westerlies blow the sand further inland, encroaching upon the forest, creating new or augmenting existing dunes. Nature, to misquote Tennyson, is red not only in tooth and claw, but leaf

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and grain. The trees persist, in an eerie co- existence.

Many Atlantic beaches offer surrounding woods, and miles of pristine beach. Crane Beach in Ipswich, MA, boasts five miles of trails and an abundance of protected wildlife—deer roam the shores in winter—but while nearby Castle Neck boasts the North Shore's largest pitch-pine forest, the trees and the sand know their place.

You can camp in the State Park, but there are so many things to do and see in the general vicinity that a hotel can provide a central base from which to venture. If you decide to travel close to home this year, the Michigan Shores area offers something for all seasons. Just 15 minutes beyond the Dunes is Baroda (pop. 873) and the Round Barn, located on the original 1912 Round Barn Estate. There, they will ply you with "grapes, grains, and spirits," plus tastings, "Shake and Stir" workshops, and food, all in a lovely pastoral setting.

A stone's throw in any given direction will lead to live theater, restaurants, pubs, antiques, art galleries, bike, kayak and paddle board rentals. The Third Coast Surf Shop will teach you ride the Lake waves, or keep your feet dry on terra firma golfing at Harbor Shores in Benton Harbor. Evening activities may start by dining at a wide variety of area venues, Timothy's Restaurant in Union Pier to name but one. Surfeited, relax at a performance in Three Oaks at the Acorn, featuring live theater and concerts in a renovated corset factory—with bar. Night owls on the prowl can roost in New Buffalo's Four Winds Casino, where the still keen-eyed will notice its glittering, vaulted dome echoes the more austere, yet imposing, pentangled supports of the Round Barn's cap.

The Warren Dunes were the height of my visit, but the Michigan Shores truly offer something for everyone. Gather fellow travelers on your balcony, raise a post-prandial glass to the moon, the bobbing boats, and friendship. Then plan your return visit. ∎

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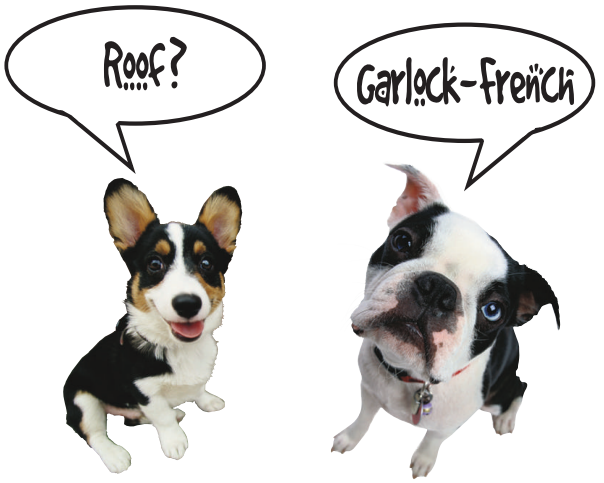

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Located on the shores of Gull Lake, Grand View Lodge offers hotel rooms to nine-bedroom cabins. The Main Lodge is on the National Register of Historic Places.
Photo courtesy of Grand View Lodge

VACATION

WITHOUT LEAVING MINNESOTA

BY MIKE MARCOTTE

Call up friends and book a nine-bedroom cabin together in Nisswa.

There's no need to purchase airline tickets if you're looking for a place to escape. The Brainerd Lakes area, which includes the cities of Brainerd, Nisswa and Baxter, Minnesota, along with surrounding communities, is less than two-and-a-half hours by car from downtown Minneapolis. You can easily get there after work on Friday and have plenty of time to relax before returning to reality.

Do your Brainerd Lakes stay the right way by skipping the conventional hotel and heading to a resort. During my January 2020 visit, I was able to unwind at *Grand View Lodge*, located on Gull Lake in Nisswa.

Dating back to 1916, Grand View's Main Lodge is on the Historic Register of Historic Places, and the charm overflows.

If you head up north with a group, Grand View offers cabins that have up to nine bedrooms, offering the perfect opportunity to plan a gathering with friends.

I stayed in Grand View's 60-room boutique hotel, which opened in July 2019. Called North, the two-level property has the typical modern amenities you would expect when traveling, while providing close access to everything Grand View has to offer, including Gull Lake.

Located next door to the boutique hotel, the recreation center NorthPark has a huge outdoor hot tub, which ended up being a popular late night spot, even when I was there in the dead of winter. Inside NorthPark, you will find a pool, water slide, fitness room, yoga studio and locker rooms. Many of the offerings at NorthPark are included with the price of your room or cabin.

Grand View offers plenty of dining options on the property. At CHAR, Grand View's steakhouse inside the Main Lodge, I enjoyed a lovely prime rib dinner and an old fashioned sitting next to a fire. Nearby, Cru Restaurant and Wine Bar has a wine cellar featuring over 2,000 bottles and has 25 wines available by the glass, serving up an elegant dining experience. Grand View also has a casual pub serving food and drink. In the summer, an on-property pizzeria will deliver to you anywhere at Grand View. And if you're there during the right time of year, you must get your fix of ice cream at The Chocolate Ox, a favorite with many folks from Northern Minnesota and across the state.

Grand View Lodge patrons get a vast, all-you-can-eat breakfast buffet, served in the Main Lodge, and it is included with your stay. The resort does a remarkable job offering gluten-free options at breakfast, including a separate section for gluten-friendly cookies, bread and waffle batter.

Grand View Lodge is a big property. A free shuttle service will bring you from your cabin or the boutique hotel to dinner or to their 1500 feet of natural shoreline on Gull Lake. Grand View is also home to two premiere golf courses, making it a popular summer destination.

Nearby downtown Nisswa offers chances to shop, eat and drink, and it's worth exploring the area. My friend Nick and I had

NorthPark, a new addition to Grand View Lodge, features an indoor pool, slide, workout facilities and a very large outdoor hot tub. Photo courtesy of Grand View Lodge

Grand View Lodge's newest property is North, a 60-room boutique hotel which opened in July 2019. Photo by Mike Marcotte

a blast exploring *Zaiser's*, a robust gift shop. From shoes to travel books to gag gifts, Zaiser's has it all. The store has a GLBT section as well.

In the same strip mall, you will find a spot voted as one of the best coffee shops in Minnesota. Viewers of KSTP-TV's *Twin Cities Live* selected *StoneHouse Coffee and Roastery* as a 'best coffee shop' in Minnesota as part of the show's 'Worth the Trip' series.

StoneHouse roasts their beans right on site. Their number one seller is the Dark Pearl, a medium dark blend. Other top coffees include the Italian Stallion, a dark blend, and Minnesota Nice, a medium roast. StoneHouse also sells their coffee in K-Cups for Keurig machines.

In addition to a cup of coffee, you must order a scone at StoneHouse. The in-house baked white chocolate blueberry scone was soft in the middle and crunchy on the outside. If you fall in love with them like I did, StoneHouse sells their scone mix so you can make your own batch at home.

And across the street from Zaiser's and StoneHouse is *Rafferty's Pizza*, right on Main Street. Their restaurant was highly recommended when I was collecting suggestions for my trip to Brainerd Lakes. In addition to Nisswa, Rafferty's has locations in Brainerd, Crosby and Crosslake.

My newest personal challenge: stay in the Brainerd Lakes area during each of Minnesota's unique four seasons. I have winter checked off. Now it's time to book a trip for spring and another this summer. It's time to call up some friends and rent out a cabin.

Special thanks to Grand View Lodge in Nisswa for accommodating Mike. To book your stay, visit www.grandviewlodge.com.

Mike Marcotte is the Senior Producer for KSTP-TV's Twin Cities Live. Read Mike's best of Minnesota guides on his website, www.givemethemike.com. ▮

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NORTH SHORE QUARTERLY | BY KASSIDY TARALA

He, She, They—WE

The WE Health Clinic supports transgender health with a variety of services and gender-affirming hormone care.

Photo courtesy of WE Health Clinic

In the 1970s, the Women's Health Center opened in the The Building For Women in Duluth, where it served as a nonprofit abortion provider, offering contraception and STI treatment. In 2017, the center's board formed a strategic plan to add services, including transgender hormone care. This plan included renaming the clinic to WE Health Clinic in 2019 to be more inclusive of its patients.

One doctor of WE Health Clinic, Dr. Judith Johnson, has more than two decades of experience working with hormone therapy and general OBGYN care.

"I have provided feminizing hormone therapy for about twenty years, previously in my general OBGYN practice here in Duluth," Dr. Johnson says. "I joined WE Health Clinic in January 2018, and I had been on the board for more than fifteen years and was part of strategic planning. We rolled out our program, which includes both masculinizing and feminizing therapy, in about June 2018."

Other than a background in gender-affirming hormone care, privacy is an important requirement of any health provider caring for transgender and non-binary patients. Dr. Johnson says WE Health Clinic practices the usual privacy protections of medical clinics, and they ask the gender, name, and pronouns of all patients on their intake forms. "We try to make our clinic space welcoming to all genders," she adds.

If a patient is interested in getting transgender and non-binary health services or gender-affirming hormone care, they can first schedule an appointment at WE Health Clinic with Dr. Johnson.

"We use an informed consent model for hormone therapy, which aligns with almost all other medical care. If a patient has a history consistent with gender dysphoria and is able to understand the risks, benefits, intended and unintended effects of hormone therapy, I consider

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them to be a good candidate for starting," Dr. Johnson explains.

She says she usually schedules two visits with her patients, the first for history-taking, discussion, drawing blood for lab work, and reviewing an informed consent document. The second visit is a brief exam, which includes examining the heart, lungs, and blood pressure of the patient. They will also review the results from the lab and receive a prescription for hormone therapy if the patient and Dr. Johnson decide to go forward with the treatment.

The transgender and non-binary health, sexual health, and reproductive health services that WE Health Clinic provides are: gender-affirming gynecological care, including abortion, cervical cancer screening, and pelvic exams; confidential STI education, screening, and treatment; birth control, including methods that are compatible with transition-related hormones; chest/breast exams; health information for nutrition, smoking cessation, and weight loss; cholesterol and blood pressure checks; urinary tract infection and vaginal infection testing and treatment; pregnancy testing and all-options pregnancy counseling; free condoms and dental dams; referrals to specialists as needed; and limited primary care services.

The clinic's gender-affirming hormone care services include feminizing and masculinizing hormone therapy and monitoring; information and referrals for gender-affirming surgeries, speech therapy, and cosmetic procedures; and post-surgical follow-up appointments.

WE Health Clinic also offers in-clinic and medication abortions, birth control, emergency contraception, pregnancy options education, STI care, PrEP, and breast and cervical cancer screening. For members of the public interested in supporting the clinic's mission, Dr. Johnson suggests a number of ways to get involved.

"Know we are here! Donate. Volunteer. Transgender hormone care and abortion care tend to be marginalized by mainstream medicine as well as the public," she says. "We want everyone to know that it is health care to which people should have access."

For more information about WE Health Clinic, visit wehealthclinic.org. ∎

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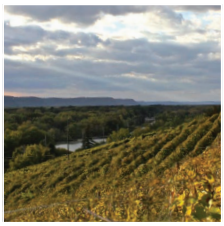

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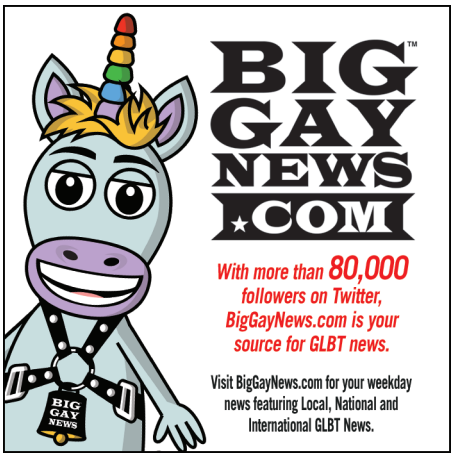

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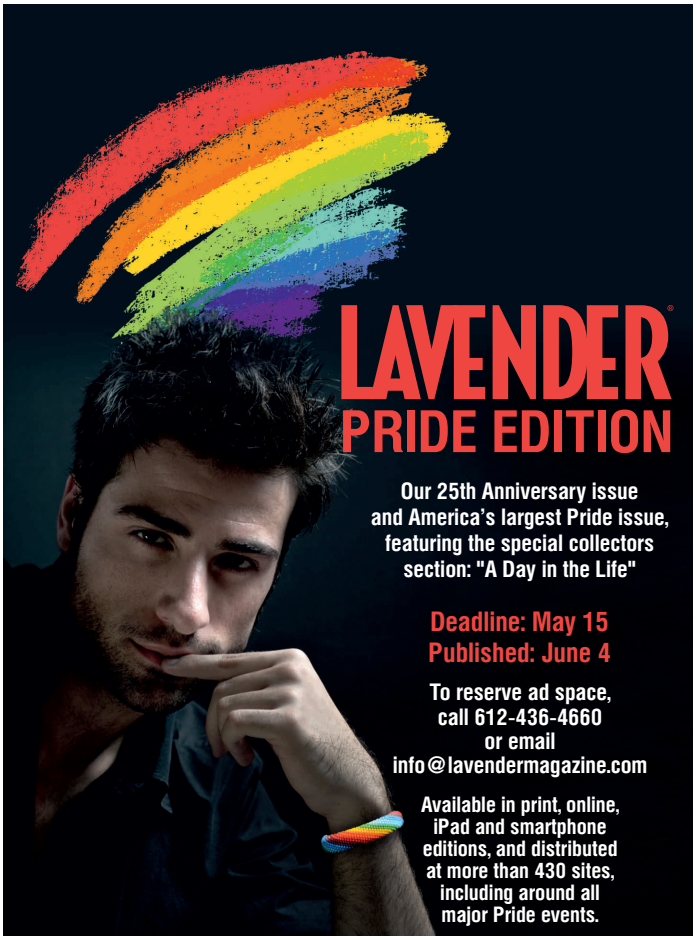
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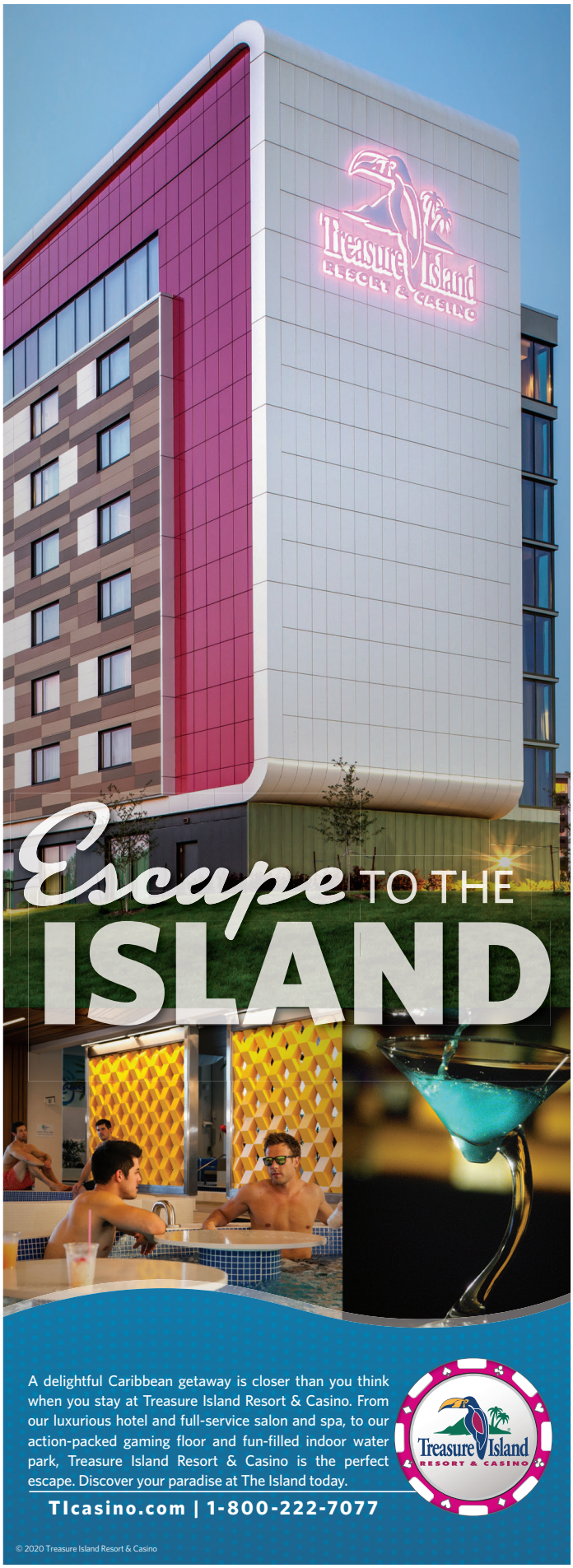
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ACE OF BABES | BY HOLLY PETERSON

OF WEIGHTED BLANKETS AND DATING APPS

I recently started dating again, which is a decision that I am blaming on my weighted blanket.

I had been lusting after a weighted blanket for nearly a year, so when my mom gave me one for Christmas I immediately started sleeping under it every night. Now, if I was the kind of person who slept on their back (spoilers: I am not) this might have turned out fine. However, since I actually sleep in a position that looks roughly like I am an actor pretending they fell off a building, sleeping under a weighted blanket every night did not, in fact, turn out fine.

In retrospect, it makes sense that a month-and-a-half's worth of being gently squished into a twist might cause back pain. At the time, however, I could not figure out where said back pain was coming from. I would wake up hurting, feel incrementally better throughout the day, go to sleep hopeful, and wake up worse than ever.

So I did the only thing I could do. In between Epsom salt baths, heating pads, and incessant complaints about my pain to whoever would listen, I downloaded a couple dating apps.

It was a double win. The initial complimentary "omg you are pretty!"s, combined with the influx of sympathy for my aching back, was exactly the ego-boost of a distraction that I needed. Say what you will about the 21st century, at least we have an unlimited supply of bored, lonely people who are willing to exchange their bored loneliness for our own.

Sure, a few of my interactions were with dicks (both literal and figurative—unsolicited dick pics are apparently still a thing), and sure, I had to explain asexuality multiple times. More than one person asked me why I was even on a dating app if I was not interested in sex. Luckily, for every person who was mad that an asexual dared use a dating app (friendly reminder that some asexuals do like having sex, but I am not one of them), there was another person who was interested in engaging in meaningful conversations about asexuality, dating, and our personal lives. Those conversations are what kept me occupied while I laid on my floor, debating if it was finally time to get over my fear of chiropractors and have a professional fix me.

Several of the people I met over my two weeks of hurt are already turning into permanent internet friends. The real-life dates I went on proved that the legion of online flirtations and the litany of asexual explanations had solidified my IRL asexual spiel to the point where it is now more personal, more detailed, and more conversational than ever before. My new internet friends live in faraway places, so chances are good that we will just stay internet friends, but they gave me the space I needed to complain about the evils of weighted blankets, added a little laughter to a brutal couple weeks, and furthered my exploration of my own identity. For that I am grateful.

As my back pain faded, so too did my interest in romance. I have not quite gotten around to deleting my dating apps (although I am almost exclusively using them to pettily swipe left on everybody at this point) and I still have a couple IRL dates scheduled, but I am most likely throwing in the dating towel for now. I got the fleeting sympathy I was looking for, a couple book and music recommendations, and I finally started watching *The Golden Girls* at the behest of a very attractive trans guy who unfortunately lives several states away. I made some new friends and went on some nice dates. All in all, I would say I am coming out ahead.

All aces have different sexual and romantic desires, but as I settle further into my own identity I am discovering that my romantic life is most like a blue moon. The current moon is waning and it is going to be a while before the next appears. In the meantime, I will occupy myself with my usual pursuits of making music, reading, writing, traveling, and taking naps until my dating moon waxes again.

I think I will start my wait with a (very brief) nap under my weighted blanket. ∎

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